WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An image reading apparatus for optically reading an image, comprising:

lighting means for lighting a predetermined region including an object to be read;

image pickup means for receiving reflected light from the predetermined region lit by said lighting means and outputting a corresponding image pickup signal;

lighting control means for controlling an amount of light emitted by said lighting means in a predetermined range so as to arrange the image pickup signal output from said image pickup means at a proper level; and

determining means for determining a dark image pickup state on the basis of the image pickup signal output from said image pickup means, wherein

said lighting control means controls the amount of light emitted by said lighting means to be low when said determining means determines the dark image pickup state.

2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

said lighting control means controls an amount of light emitted by said lighting means to be the lowest, within the predetermined range, when said determining means determines the dark image pickup state.

3. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein,

when said lighting control means controls, upon said determining means determining a dark image pickup state, an amount of light emitted by said lighting means to be low, said lighting control means controls an amount of light emitted by said lighting means so as to set the image pickup signal output from said image pickup means at a predetermined level.

4. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

when said lighting means is configured to repeatedly generate pulsed light in units of image pickup frames,

said determining means determines a dark image pickup state in units of the image pickup frames,

said lighting control means controls an amount of light emitted by said lighting means in units of the image pickup frames.

5. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

said determining means determines a dark image pickup state using an image pickup signal corresponding to a substantial center area in an image pickup display among image pickup signals output from said image pickup means.

6. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

said lighting control means controls an amount of light emitted by said lighting means within a predetermined range so as to set the maximum value of an image pickup signal output from said image pickup

means at a proper level.

7. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

said determining means compares the maximum value of an image pickup signal output from said image pickup means to a predetermined threshold, and determines a dark image pickup state in a case where the maximum value falls below the predetermined threshold.

8. The apparatus according to claim 7, wherein,

when the maximum value is determined, by said determining means, to be equal to or above the predetermined threshold,

said lighting control means controls an amount of light emitted by said lighting means within a predetermined range to set an image pickup signal output from said image pickup means at proper level.

9. An image reading apparatus for optically reading an image, comprising:

a LED for lighting a predetermined region including an object to be read;

an image pickup element for receiving reflected light from the predetermined region lit by said LED and outputting a corresponding image pickup signal;

a dark image pickup detecting circuit for determining a dark image pickup state on the basis of the image pickup signal output from said image pickup element; and

a control section for controlling an amount of

light supplied by said LED within a predetermined range to set the image pickup signal output from said image pickup element at a proper level, and controlling an amount of light supplied from said LED to be low, when said dark image pickup detecting circuit determines a dark image pickup state.

10. The apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said control section, when said dark image pickup detecting circuit determines the dark image pickup state, controls an amount of light of said LED to become the lowest in the predetermined range.

11. The apparatus according to claim 9, wherein, when said control section controls, upon said dark image pickup detecting circuit determining a dark image pickup state, an amount of light emitted by the LED to be low, said control section controls an amount of light of said LED so as to set the image pickup signal output from said image pickup element at a predetermined level.

12. The apparatus according to claim 9, wherein, when said LED is driven to repeatedly generate light pulses in units of image pickup frames,

said dark image pickup detecting circuit determines a dark image pickup state in units of the image pickup frames,

said control section controls an amount of light of said LED in units of the image pickup frames.

13. The apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said dark image pickup detecting circuit determines a dark image pickup state using an image pickup signal corresponding to a substantial center area in an image pickup display among image pickup signals output from said image pickup element.

14. The apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said control section controls an amount of light of said LED within a predetermined range so as to set the maximum value of an image pickup signal output from said image pickup element at a proper level.

15. The apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said dark image pickup detecting circuit compares the maximum value an of image pickup signal output from said image pickup element to a predetermined threshold, and determines a dark image pickup state in a case where the maximum value falls below the predetermined threshold.

16. The apparatus according to claim 15, wherein when the maximum value is determined to be equal to or above the predetermined threshold by said dark image pickup detecting circuit,

said control section controls an amount of light of said LED within a predetermined range so as to set an image pickup signal output from said image pickup element at a proper level.